



Increase in Fire MSBU Frequently Asked Questions

Why are increases in the fire MSBU needed?

Simply, the increases are needed to improve fire and medical services in Santa Rosa County as a whole. Current funding was designed to support fire services, not medical first response services. Santa Rosa County is so large, ambulance service can not respond to all emergency calls in a timely manner. In order to maintain a “no subsidy” ambulance contract, it is necessary to pool existing resources and fire departments are needed to respond to many non-fire related calls.

What communities will benefit from the increased fire MSBU?

Nine stations will benefit: Allenton, Bagdad, Berrydale, East Milton, Harold, Munson, Pace Skyline, and Jay. Holley-Navarre, Midway, Avalon and Navarre Beach are special taxing districts and will not be affected. Gulf Breeze and Milton fire services are provided by the city governments.

Are the increases a result of mandated tax cuts?

No, the increase in the fire MSBU was one of the findings of the December 2006 consultant report assessing the EMS response system in Santa Rosa County conducted by Fitch & Associates. While reviewing the EMS system, Fitch found that the county should become more involved with fire service through governance and leadership, by developing a countywide plan that addressed the immediate issues for fire and EMS, and to create a five and 10 year vision for service throughout the county.

How will residents benefit from an increase in the fire MSBU?

The additional funding will increase response and decrease response time. The increase will allow departments to upgrade or replace unreliable equipment. It will allow each district to purchase more first responder equipment which, in turn, allows more equipped first responders to go directly to the scene of a medical emergency. Departments will be able to purchase more communication equipment which is needed to provide a safe and effective response and provide a direct link with the Tier II transport unit. The increase also proposes construction of a training facility which will enhance our ability to recruit and retain more fire and rescue personnel and provide consistent training capabilities.

Has it already been decided to implement the increased MSBU?

Yes, the board of county commissioners voted to approve an increase in fire services MSBU.

Will operational changes take place?

Yes, the fire services systems will look very different compared to 2006-2007. Guided by the recommendations of the Fitch Report, the following improvements will be made:

- The county will play a more involved role in fire services. Through increased monitoring, creation of standard operating guidelines, and the hiring of an emergency services coordinator, the county will take a stronger leadership role.
- An Emergency Services Coordinator, dedicated to leadership and oversight has been hired. This position will provide a focal point for accountability, oversee the EMS contract, coordinate fire departments, and is responsible for pulling together a unified system.
- An executive group has been established consisting of MSBU Fire Chiefs, which will maintain the integrity of the volunteer system while allowing for functional consolidation in appropriate areas.
- The MSBU account will now be a joint account and stations will work together to pool resources. Funds will be distributed based on need as decided by the executive group.
- Each fire district will be required to be financially accountable by submitting a budget and participating in audits and reviews.
- Fire agreements will be maintained by the county attorney and violations of the agreement will result in withholding of non-essential funds.
- The public will have increased input. Each fire district will be required to hold a public meeting with minutes once a month.
- The county will conduct a self assessed, semi-annual review using 50 EMS benchmarks created by Fitch & Associates.
- Paid staffing levels will increase. The Fitch Report recommended that the county integrate volunteer and paid fire services into a seamless first response tier.
- A stipend program for the volunteers at all stations except Bagdad and Munson will be implemented.
- Fire services will be required to respond to all calls determined to be emergencies by dispatch. Currently, due to staffing levels and insufficient equipment, fire stations may only respond to the most critical of calls, increasing response times.

What is the funding level of the current MSBU? What is the expected level with the increase?

The current MSBU accounts for \$923,857.38 of the annual fire budget. The county subsidized the FY 2006-2007 budget by \$178,220. The increase is expected to raise the fire budget to approximately \$2.69 million annually with no subsidy.

How will the increases be assessed?

Currently, all single family dwellings pay \$30, commercial or institutional building are assessed \$37.50 for 5,000 sq. ft. or less and \$150 for buildings greater than 5,000 sq. ft., multifamily dwellings, mobile home parks or RV Parks, and hotel/motels pay \$15 per unit/hook up. Vacant acreage is assessed 15 cents per acre with a minimum assessment of \$3.75 and a cap of \$450.

The new MSBU is on a sliding scale, based on size:

Residential & Mobile Homes not in a Park- *Square footage determined as living space, not under roof*

0-3500 sq. ft.	\$85.00
3501-above sq. ft.	\$175.00

Commercial and Multi-family 5+ units- 2.5 cents per sq. ft., \$150 minimum

Multi-family less than 5 units and Condos- 75.00 per unit

Agricultural and Vacant lots- 10.00 per one acre parcel and 2 cents per acre over the first acre.

Sylviculture (Timber)- 10.00 first 200 acre parcel and .15 cents per acre over 200 acres.

Recreational vehicle parks and mobile home parks- \$30.00 per lot

Hotel and Motel- 2.5 cents per square foot

How many structures are in each size breakout?

- 0-3500 Square Feet- 22,429
- 3501 Square Feet and above- 1,257

Will paid staffing levels increase?

Yes. Currently, the nine stations that will benefit from the MSBU increase have only one paid staff member, the chief at Skyline. If approved, four paid positions will be added to the Pace Fire Department and two will be added to the Skyline Department in the first year. In the second year, two positions are expected to be added and four additional positions in year three, all at stations to be determined based on the greatest need. Beginning the fourth year, the creation of additional paid positions will be evaluated on a yearly basis. Paid staff will be assigned to a specific station, but they will be available to respond to any area needed.

A stipend program for the volunteer firefighters at all stations except Bagdad and Munson will also be implemented. Currently, the volunteers receive no financial support for the vital role they play in keeping our community safe and stipends have been successful with many fire services throughout the United States as a recruitment and retention strategy. Three different systems of stipends will be utilized for the first year the MSBU increase is approved. After evaluation of all three systems, one will be chosen and will be adopted countywide in the second year.

What types of equipment will be purchased if the increased funding is approved?

If passed, over the next 5 years the county will purchase new fire and rescue apparatus for departments based upon equipment usage. Outdated apparatus will begin to be replaced and this will add savings to maintenance and insurance cost. The capital will be purchased and owned by the county.

Proposed Apparatus 5 Year Plan

Year	Ladder	Engine	Tanker	Service	Rescue/Mini Pumper	Totals
2007/2008		3	1	4	2	1,332,000
2008/2009	1	1		1	2	1,308,000
2009/2010		1	1	3	1	709,000
2010/2011		1	1	1	2	748,000
2011/2012	1	1		2	1	1,211,000

Estimated Apparatus Cost

Engines	\$250,000
Tankers	\$220,000
Ladder Truck	\$780,000
Rescue/Mini Pumper	\$125,000
Service Trucks	\$28,000

We will also be utilizing a redeployment plan that will move apparatus from the higher call load districts to lower call load districts. This redeployment plan will allow for more usable years of service per apparatus. Needs of each department will be continually assessed and monitored.

Deployment Plan

Year	Ladder	Engine	Tanker	Service	Rescue/Mini Pumper
2007/2008		Pace 2 Skyline 1	Allentown 1	Pace 2 Skyline 1 Munson 1	Bagdad 1 Jay 1
2008/2009	Pace 1	Skyline 1		Skyline 1	Pace 1 East Milton 1
2009/2010		Pace 1	Jay 1	Pace 1 Skyline 1 East Milton 1	Allentown 1
2010/2011		Bagdad 1	Munson 1	Bagdad 1	Skyline1 Pace 1
2011/2012	Pace or Skyline	East Milton 1		Skyline 1 Pace 1	Harold 1

Facilities will also see improvements:

Allentown	?	Upgrade for bunk rooms	\$100,000*
Bagdad	2008/2009	Replace station/ Current station not built for newer equipment/ start researching land I10 area	\$750,000
Berrydale	?	Possibly a station in the southern area, will be determined after analysis of system	\$230,000*
East Milton	2009/2010	Replace station/current station needs upgrading or replacing. Past hurricane damage.	\$750,000
Harold	2008/2009	Current station is inadequate/not enough space for truck or meeting area	\$300,000
Munson	2009/2010	Need substation in the Deaton Bridge area	\$230,000
Pace	2007/2008	New main station	\$1,200,000
Pace	2008/2009	Add on to station 3/ Bunk rooms/ meeting room/ etc.	\$250,000
Skyline	2008/2009	Add on to station 1/Bunk rooms/training area/etc	\$250,000
Central Area	2008/2009	Centralized county training facility/Meets Florida standards for live burns.	\$1,500,000
		Total	\$5,230,000

**Estimates are not calculated in to the budget, they are future needs. These estimates will be less if land is available that does not have to be purchased.*

How will budgets be monitored?

Currently, the clerk of the court only monitors a department's check register and invoices. In the new system, each fire district will create a budget and submit it to the executive group. The executive group will review the budgets to ensure all issues are addressed in accordance with the five-year plan. Once the executive group has approved the budgets for all the stations, they will be forwarded to the board of county commissioners for approval. Additionally, the executive group will perform annual audits. Any monies not spent in accordance with the approved budget for a station will have non-essential funds withheld until compliance has been reached.

If any inappropriate expenditures are found during the audit process, the executive group will address the issues and report the findings to the Santa Rosa County Board of County Commissioners. The clerk of the court will continued to be involved and will conduct any follow up audits needed. All meetings will be opened to the public.

Will residents have input?

Yes, citizens will have more avenues than ever before to ask questions or voice a concern. In addition to attending the monthly local department meetings that are open to the public with minutes recorded, residents will also be able contact the county emergency services coordinator and add comments online at <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/firedept/index.html>.